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Odysseus's Journey on the Phaeacian Ship: A Curious Case of a Hero Becoming a Charioteer*

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Abstract

As sailors par excellence, the Phaeacians row their ship expeditiously in Book 13 of the *Odyssey* to escort Odysseus back to Ithaca. Into the open sea, the ship advances in such a swift manner that even a hawk, the best of flying beasts, could not but fall behind (13.87). This contrast to highlight the Phaeacians' nautical navigation skills proves their virtuosity, but Homer's use of a simile here perhaps should be explored further—the fast-moving ship resembles a chariot drawn by four stallions on land (13.81-83). Homer's comparison displays the Phaeacians' excellence in sailing; it is also true, though, that thereby he subtly transforms Odysseus into a charioteer. Such a situation is complicated by the possibility that Homer's simile of the Phaeacian ship as a four-horse chariot alludes, as Catalin Anghelina notices, to Poseidon's charioteering in the *Iliad* (13.23-31). Therein lies the mention of a hawk, too, which indicates that the sea god drives his chariot as dexterously as the majestic bird flies (13.63). Yet, if one recalls that Odysseus moves faster than a hawk, one could infer accordingly that the hero is a charioteer superior to Poseidon. So, it seems that Homer implicates the hero again in usurping a divine power he has already unfortunately profaned. This paper

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thus aims to address Odysseus's heroism in terms of athletics and then reconsider the role of the hero's journey on the Phaeacian ship in relation to his embittered relationship with Poseidon—in point of charioteering, a culturally significant dimension that has drawn rare notice in literary criticism. Moreover, this paper also finds it necessary to contextualize the said issues in the oracular message given by Teiresias to the hero, as it implies narrative elements which make the *apologoi* cohere with the general picture of the *Odyssey*.

Keywords: Odysseus, Poseidon, charioteering, charioteer, Phaeacian ship, Greek sport

> But when thou hast slain the wooers in thy halls, whether by guile or openly with the sharp sword, then do thou go forth, taking a shapely oar, until thou comest to men that know naught of the sea and eat not of food mingled with salt, aye, and they know naught of ships with purple cheeks, or of shapely oars that are as wings unto ships. And I will tell thee a sign right manifest, which will not escape thee. When another wayfarer, on meeting thee, shall say that thou hast a winnowing-fan on thy stout shoulder, then do thou fix in the earth thy shapely oar and make goodly offerings to lord Poseidon—a ram, and a bull, and a boar that mates with sows—and depart for thy home and offer sacred hecatombs to the immortal gods who hold broad heaven, to each one in due order.[1]
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> —Homer, *Odyssey* 11.119-34

Problematics of the Oar

This paper chooses to begin from Teiresias's oracle imparted to Odysseus in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, where, as Circe has instructed, the hero should go on a catabasis to Hades's domain and seek "the spirit of Theban Teiresias, the blind seer, whose mind abides steadfast" to inquire about his *nostos* (homecoming) (10.491-93). For one thing, the blind prophet's injunction to Odysseus that he should take the oar challenge to have a happy ending by pacifying Poseidon seems to have been insufficiently considered.[2] Among others, just one fact can illustrate such insufficiency. Homer does not tell how the hero fulfills this journey that would consummate his heroic story, which enigmatizes gods' concern in Book 1 that he should return to Ithaca despite the sea god's ire. At best, in Book 23, the penultimate part in the epic, Odysseus repeats to Penelope Teiresias' injunction (267-80), but there is no more: a message sent and read but bizarrely not turned into action. The other thing is that the oar challenge (to meet people mistaking this long pole with a blade for a winnowing device) also seems to dominate the whole content of the oracle and circulate in history like a meme. That is, the soothsayer's message has been viewed partially without

[1] The translations of Greek texts in this paper are taken from the Perseus Digital Library, with the *Odyssey* concerned here being translated by A. T. Murray. Please refer to the works cited. Additionally, if readers are interested in recent prominent translations of the *Odyssey*, they might want to read Emily Wilson's distinctive rendition.

[2] As the author of the present paper has found so far, the only study devoted to interpreting the injunction in its entirety is William F. Hansen's folkloric understanding of the details therein (1990). However, Hansen's interest does not lie in the correlation between oars, wings, and athleticism this paper focuses on; moreover, his "comparative" approach shows that the oar in the prophecy symbolizes less than expected: "…the significance of the detail [planting the oar in the ground] is simply that it marks the end of the mariner's quest and his retirement from seafaring. . . . The hypothesis of a cultic oar is therefore unnecessary" ("Odysseus and the Oar" 256).

attending to the other equally signifying elements in the same oracular narrative. One problematic aspect might be: if in the main Odysseus has to quest for Poseidon's pardon, it is also true that the completion of the test obviously involves other gods as well. Teiresias unambiguously orders the hero to "offer sacred hecatombs to the immortal gods who hold broad heaven, to each one in due order" after he meets anyone who cannot recognize the oar and returns home (11.132-34).

Therefore, this paper wishes to look upon the seer's message as a micro but self-sufficient narrative in which each and every element engages with one another to signify an interpretation that goes beyond Odysseus's pacification of Poseidon—even though the oar remains the focal point used to put other details in the oracle and the *Odyssey* in perspective. In particular, the topic to be considered in relation to the oar narrative is its own symbolic correlation and intertextuality with Odysseus as an athlete, with the purpose of suggesting that the hero's final journey serves as an *agon* (contest) to consummate his athletic identity. Such a proposal might sound rather odd and dubious. However, note that Homer likens the Phaeacian ship carrying and escorting Odysseus back to Ithaca to an act of charioteering (an *agon* in ancient sport).[3] Namely, oars related to navigation also very likely connect to charioteering in the Homeric world. Take into consideration as well the Phaeacian games in Book 8, the boxing contest with Irus in Book 18, and the archery competition with suitors in Book 21. Readers familiar with these *agones* in the *Odyssey* shall recall how these events contribute substantially to the major leitmotifs in the plot, including identity, hospitality, and *nostos* on the part of Odysseus. That said, very few (or none, so far) would view the whole *Odyssey* tacitly also as a story about Odysseus as an athlete or becoming an all-round athlete—to become a charioteer, in particular—but considering the above, there is this possibility of seeing the epic as sport-themed especially when the oar challenge narrative comes into play.

How Oars Connect to Wings and Athleticism

With Teiresias indicating to Odysseus so unmistakably that Poseidon "has laid up wrath in his heart against thee, angered that thou didst blind his

[3] In *Od*. 13.81-82, Homer relates: "And as on a plain four yoked stallions spring forward all together beneath the strokes of the lash" (ὥς τ᾽ ἐν πεδίῳ τετράοροι ἄρσενες ἵπποι, / πάντες ἅμ᾽ ὁρμηθέντες ὑπὸ πληγῆσιν ἱμάσθλης).

dear son" (11.101-02), the oar test serves as a generally understood form of pilgrimage for the hero to appease a wronged Olympian sire. According to Lance Hosey, the wretched sacker of Troy will—acting as the god's "missionary"—employ the oar to "extend Poseidon's domain beyond the boundaries of his immediate realm, the sea" (4). Studies by scholars such as S. Douglas Olson and Hansen propose a very similar reading of the oar-carrying inland, to the effect that the hero has to teach people ignorant of Poseidon that there is this great sea deity to worship and supplicate. In light of this, the oar test functions not only as a narrative cohering with the concoction in the epic but also as a narrative reaching the readers' quotidian and worldly narrative. That is, in Hansen's words, Odysseus's last journey is "the foundation legend of one or more inland sanctuaries of Poseidon" ("Odysseus's Last Journey" 32). It thus works like mythology to offer an "aition" to explain how these sanctuaries have been built far away from the sea or on the mountain peaks ("Odysseus's Last Journey" 35).[4]

Hence, the oracle Odysseus receives from Teiresias becomes a covenant between the hero and the sea god in order to inspire those who have not yet been initiated into the cult of Poseidon. Perhaps one habitual practice could explain the necessity of making "a prodigious effort to sacrifice" to the sea lord in an inland place where the oar is just an unidentified object ("Odysseus's Last Journey" 32). Drawing on a certain scholiast's observation, Hansen explains the practice as follows: "…the best way to honor a man or god who is already honored in one place, is to bring it about that he also receives honor in another place" ("Odysseus's Last Journey" 32).[5] So, through Odysseus's preaching, the sea god would be revered as "Poseidon *epeirotes*," namely, "Poseidon of the Land" ("Odysseus and the Oar" 249).[6]

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[4] What is of interest here is that perhaps people inland have not been uninitiated as the above interpretation has suggested. As Noel Robertson's strenuous collection of bits and pieces from antiquity shows, Poseidon used to be a household name and "worshipped in every part of Greece as a god of general importance to the community" (1). The fade-out of his popularity, as Robertson sarcastically comments, makes the hero's oar test merely "a mocking and belated tribute to his former domain"—since he is pathetically "chivvied by Zeus" and "flouted by Odysseus" (1).

[5] This might be one of the reasons why Odysseus has to make his name known to Polyphemus after he narrowly escapes from the giant cannibal's cave (*Od*. 9.502-05). As Will Magee has observed, the hero and Achilles, as well as their intrepid counterparts, are "intrinsically competitive"; they "are constantly striving for more *kleos* [glory], for more *timḗ* [honor], and can never have enough of one or the other."

[6] The inland place where the sea is a nebulous idea has been traditionally "localized" somewhere in Epirus ("Odysseus's Last Journey" 33). It is so perhaps because the name of this terra firma has been derived from *epeiros* (ἤπειρος), which refers to the land as opposed to the sea (Liddell and Scott, s.v. "ἤπειρος"). One thing to note, though, is that the ancient Epirus is actually situated near the Ionian sea (Britannica). In my view, this geography suggests, among others, proximity to the sea does not necessar-

Thus far, it can be seen that the oar Odysseus bears symbolizes the possible way for him to reconcile with Poseidon. Nevertheless, if one temporarily sidesteps the entire oracular message and considers how Homer describes the oar, a seemingly negligible metaphor could possibly transform the epical world into a grand narrative underlined by athleticism. Let one recall first that oars are, as Teiresias describes them to Odysseus in the underworld, "as wings [πτερὰ] unto ships [νηυσὶ]" (11.125). The hero reiterates this part of the oracle to Penelope without omitting the comparison (23.272). He relays to her that the seer commands him to take an oar to a place where people are illiterate regarding oars, which "serve as wings [πτερὰ] to ships [νηυσὶ]" (23.272). It is these references to wings, when feathers are found here and there especially in the *apologoi* (Odysseus's own storytelling) of the *Odyssey*, that coalesce into a composite image or an actual fashioning of the hero as a charioteer—to counter the stereotypical identity of him as only a hero of *metis* (craftiness), or at best, a hero of cunning devices with athletic prowess.

The connection between wings and athleticism appears nominally strained, but Homer himself provides a seemingly paltry but potentially thought-provoking clue in Book 13 of the *Odyssey*. To begin with, therein, one essential narrative piece reports the goodwilled Phaeacians rowing their ship to take Odysseus home under escort. The poet applies the following simile:

> And as on a plain four yoked stallions spring forward all together beneath the strokes of the lash, and leaping on high swiftly accomplish their way, even so the stern of that ship leapt on high, and in her wake the dark wave of the loud-sounding sea foamed mightily, and she sped safely and surely on her way; not even the circling hawk, the swiftest of winged things, could have kept pace with her. (13.81-87)

The comparison here refers to the likeness between the Phaeacian ship and a horse-driven chariot—"as on a plain four yoked stallions."[7] Remarkably, the Phaeacian sailors excel so exceptionally in rowing and managing the ship that even the most fast-flying creature, the hawk, lags behind. Moreover, the word "stern" (πρύμνη) as used here in the simile has led scholars to postulate that Homer intends the leaping or lifting of the back part of the ship to mean the "yoked stallions" are galloping (Anghelina 26).[8]

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ily guarantee familiarity with it in the Homeric world; thus, Odysseus's pilgrimage signifies because of its symbolism instead of the travail he must undertake. Classical sources also indicate that the ancient Arkadia might be where the hero's journey takes place: "the Arkadians were *êpeirôtai par excellence* of the Greek world," since it is not bounded by the sea at all ("Odysseus's Last Journey" 33).

[7] Note that Homer has not used the word for "chariot" in Greek; rather, the idea of this vehicle is suggested by the expression "four yoked stallions" (τετράοροι) joined to a chariot (Anghelina 31).

[8] For readers' reference, the composite image of the ship-horse expressed in the "equestrian lan-

Fundamentally, let one heed "the swiftest of winged things," which is the hawk lagging behind the Phaeacian ship. The expression "winged things" (πετεηνῶν) here refers to those who are "able to fly" and "full-fledged" (Liddell and Scott, s.v. "πετεηνῶν"). As it appears, Homer makes it possible through the chariot simile for readers to transition between rowing and flying and correlate and merge the two together into one entity. One can thus readily imagine the Phaeacian ship as a winged creature that flies amazingly well and more swiftly than hawks. However, if one revisits the oracular text cited earlier, it seems that Homer is aiming at something ontologically literal, rather than sheerly metaphorical. What Teiresias divulges to Odysseus—in relation to wings and flight—goes that the hero should go inland far enough to meet people who know nothing about "shapely oars that are as wings unto ships." In the hero's relaying of the message to his wife, he repeats the wing-like oar statement—exactly in the same words the seer has revealed to the supplicant ("πτερὰ νηυσὶ πέλονται"). One should be cautious regarding the comparison, however, because the word "πέλονται" (*pelontai*) in the statement does not point to an act of comparison. It is the conjugation of the ancient Greek verb for "come into existence," "become," or "be" ("πέλω," *pelo*) and involves no comparison or contrast (Liddell and Scott, s.v. "πέλω"). In other words, the dialectic between oars and wings in the oracular context bears a resemblance to a metamorphosis like that of Daphne transformed into a laurel, instead of presenting a juxtaposition aimed at cognitive alignment. At this stage, with the inherent correspondence between the ship, the chariot, and the oar as the bard has established, one could contextualize the oar challenge in a charioteering *agon* since now a flying chariot appears to coordinate the elements here and there.[9]

Before the coordination can be explored in greater detail, let one consider the word "πέλονται" (*pelontai*) again. In fact, the conjugation of "πέλω" (*pelo*) into "πέλονται" (*pelontai*) does not merely signify the idea of oars becoming wings or vice versa in the *Odyssey*. As a matter of fact, this change of the verb form is an articulation of the middle voice instead of being presented in the active voice. In ancient Greek, if the middle voice is used, one should understand

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guage" is not the only comparison between ships and horses in the *Odyssey*; in 4.708, the ships are visualized as horses, too, though not "horses driving chariots" (Anghelina 27). That is when the surprised wife Penelope wonders remonstratively why her son Telemachus should "go on board swift-faring ships" and "cross over the wide waters of the sea" (4.708-09). Amid her anxiety, this worried mother likens incidentally the ships to the ones "which serve men as horses [ἵπποι] of the deep" (4.708).

[9] To clarify, even though Homer transforms the Phaeacian ship into a flying chariot without specifying so, this transformation goes beyond the mere work of a simile and makes the ship a de facto chariot through the word just discussed: "πέλονται" (pelontai). The ship being inherently a chariot can be further supported by the concept of "natural culture" (Hosey 7) introduced later in this section.

the subject to be neither acting on the object nor acted on by it. That is, the subject acts on itself, for itself, or on something that belongs to itself.[10] More or less, the subject always involves itself reflexively in the middle voice. So, the oars and the wings partake of each other, leading one to view Odysseus's final journey as a likely form of the *agon* charioteering. Naturally, more key details and facets in and of the *Odyssey* should and will be taken into consideration to corroborate the hypothesis this paper has just stated. Yet, in relation to the bizarre interchangeability between oars and wings, one cultural stage has perhaps escaped general notice.

For the early Greeks, the meanings of objects are rather circumstantial and conditional so that the names given to these objects could hardly pinpoint and fix what the objects could signify. To reason out this intricate relationship between objects in connection with names, Hosey explains that these Greeks live in a "natural culture" where nature and culture are blended so closely that humans' willful design of objects has not yet reached the stage of the kind of culture trying to impose meanings on nature with names (7). For instance, in using the word "*hylē*," Homer switches between the ideas of "forests" and "timber" (Hosey 7). This is because the essence of a thing (e.g. *hylē*), however capable humans are of transforming it into an oar, a ship, or just any other object, belongs to the knowledge of gods (7). Hosey also raises an example from the *Odyssey* to illustrate such godly omniscience and humans' benightedness (12). That is, in 10.302-05, as Hermes hands an herbal medicine to Odysseus, the hero understands the nature of the herb through the messenger god's explanation. He tells his Phaeacian audience: "So saying, Argeiphontes [Hermes] gave me the herb, drawing it from the ground, and showed me its nature [φύσιν]. At the root it was black, but its flower was like milk."[11] Note that the "nature" of the medicine should be explained profoundly by a god to a hero whose heroism resides precisely, among others, in his *metis*. Thus, the hierarchy in Hosey's "natural culture" theory in terms of the knowledge gap between deities and mortals cannot be more stringent. Things possess the potential of becoming whatever gods know they will become—the type of knowledge forbidden or inaccessible to humans. The latter's attempt to make an object out of a thing skillfully and dexterously allows only "one aspect of an object that previously had been hidden" (Hosey 7). All these echo and return to the use of "πέλονται"

[10] For related grammar, please refer to Jeff Rydberg-Cox's digital lessons on ancient Greek: https://daedalus.umkc.edu/FirstGreekBook/JWW_FGB19.html.

[11] Per Hosey, it is in this text that the word *physis* (φῦσῖς) first appears in the Greek vocabulary (12). Homer's use of it harbors both of the meanings: "the living environment" and "the true 'nature' of a thing" that gods have the privilege to own and appropriate (7).

(*pelontai*) in the oracle communicated to Odysseus, contributing to the hypothetical matrix of ship, chariot, and oar, which inhere with one another for their transformative capacity in the preclassical period.

The Implicit Chariot Race between Odysseus and Poseidon

On the condition that Homer compares the Phaeacian ship to a horse-driven chariot that not even the most expeditious bird, the hawk, can overtake, and given that the word "πέλονται" (*pelontai*) in the oracle implies the de facto metamorphosis of the ship into a chariot, Odysseus's homeward journey on the Phaeacian ship makes him a charioteer in the company of the Phaeacian sailor-charioteers. Yet, a journey back to Ithaca on the ship-chariot does not seem to amount to an *agon* like the athletic competitions in Book 8, Book 18, and Book 21. Moreover, one might also wonder how the oar test could possibly continue the equestrian *agon* and question the inherent notion of charioteering in the form of navigation even if now the word "πέλονται" (*pelontai*) in the oracle suggests the "natural culture" that is the modus vivendi particular to the early Greeks.

Actually, the not immediately apparent *agon* relates to a contest against Poseidon. For this, let one resort to an allusion proposed by Catalin Anghelina. He argues that how the Phaeacian ship moves "primarily alludes to Poseidon's swift chariot" in the *Iliad* (13.29) (29). To begin with, the sea god is then observing the Trojan War and resolves to offer the Greeks his divine assistance. To reach Troy, he rides and drives his chariot, flying over the sea:

> Thither came he, and let harness beneath his car his two bronze hooved horses, swift of flight, with flowing manes of gold; and with gold he clad himself about his body, and grasped the well-wrought whip of gold, and stepped upon his car, and set out to drive over the waves. Then gambolled the sea-beasts beneath him on every side from out the deeps, for well they knew their lord, and in gladness the sea parted before him; right swiftly sped they on, and the axle of bronze was not wetted beneath; and unto the ships of the Achaeans did the prancing steeds bear their lord. (13.23-31)

This passage shows pronouncedly the swiftness and smoothness of Poseidon's charioteering across the deep: the god's exquisite charioteering skills are supposedly conceivable; his horses are beyond doubt adroit, embellished with "flowing manes of gold" that match the god's donning of golden armor; the sea also honors its lord by making way for him dutifully. Be aware, however, that Poseidon actually "flies" his chariot since the horses can glide in the air. They are "swift of flight" (ὠκυπέτα, *okupeta*). The Greek word for it means either "swift-flying" or

"swift-running" (Liddell and Scott, s.v. "ὠκυπέτα"). Obviously, the translation meets the context. Moreover, to describe the fast speeding of the horses, Homer uses the word "πέτοντο" (*petonto*), whose core meaning is "fly" (Liddell and Scott, s.v. "πέτοντο"). So, one can observe that the sea god's chariot here exemplifies the "hypothetical matrix" mentioned above, with the dialecticization of flying and land activities. A thing can become an otherwise unthinkable object, and Homer demonstrates Poseidon's insurmountable charioteering performance through the matrix that is a reality in the "natural culture."

There lies the rub. As Anghelina has observed, when Poseidon later quits the Trojan War scene in his winged chariot, Homer describes how the god leaves as "a hawk, swift of flight, speedeth forth to fly" (13.62) (31). Such a reference to "hawk" immediately reminds one of the speedy moving of the Phaeacian ship in the *Odyssey*: "not even the circling hawk, the swiftest of winged things, could have kept pace with her" (13.86-87). Conspicuously, exactly the same simile has been made: Homer avails himself of the feathered animal "hawk" (ἴρηξ, *ireks*) in highlighting the swiftness of both Poseidon's chariot and the Phaeacian ship-chariot. However, a factor that Anghelina has not explored further but matters crucially regarding this paper is that an *agon* comes into existence through the intertextuality between the two epics.[12] In a significant way, the hero on the Phaeacian ship is competing with Poseidon in a chariot race unknowingly, resulting in the victory of Odysseus over the sea god since as a hawk, the Phaeacian ship flies with much better virtuosity than Poseidon's chariot.

From the perspective of sport, Odysseus's traumatization of Polyphemus has foreshadowed the implied *agon* between the hero and the god. A quasi-contest takes place after the one-eyed monster realizes that the man before him is surprisingly the one who a seer has prophesized will mutilate his eye (9.507-12). Then the god's brutish son "lifted on high again a far greater stone, and swung and hurled it, putting into the throw measureless strength" in order to sabotage Odysseus, his ship, and his crew (9.537-38). With "a far greater stone" and "measureless strength," though, the Cyclops's attack leaves the stone "a little behind the dark-prowed ship" and "barely missed the end of the steering-oar" (9.539-40). It is a close call for Odysseus, but the monster falls through in point of fact—pitifully vis-à-vis a man he has expected to be "one that is puny," "of naught," and "a weakling" (9.515).

[12] Anghelina recognizes this intertextuality, but with a very different concern—either why there is the difference between the two-horse chariot for Poseidon and the four-horse chariot for the Phaeacians or whether the great sailors have committed profanity against the sea god by charioteering faster (31, 33).

The throw of the stone by the Cyclops becomes athletic because of the parallel narrative of the Phaeacian games in Book 8.[13] King Alcinous has meant the games to entertain Odysseus, but an unwise and impulsive youth called Euryalus denounces the hero's athletic identity (8.164). Such humiliation prompts the city-sacker to counter-attack:

> He spoke, and, leaping up with his cloak about him as it was, seized a discus larger than the rest and thick, no little heavier than those with which the Phaeacians were wont to contend one with another. This with a whirl he sent from his stout hand, and the stone hummed as it flew; and down they crouched to the earth, the Phaeacians of the long oars, men famed for their ships, beneath the rush of the stone. Past the marks of all it flew, speeding lightly from his hand, and Athena, in the likeness of a man, set the mark, and she spoke and addressed him: "Even a blind man, stranger, could distinguish this mark, groping for it with his hands, for it is in nowise confused with the throng of the others, but is far the first. Be thou of good cheer for this bout at least: no one of the Phaeacians will reach this, or cast beyond it." (8.186-98)

One can readily identify the very similar attempt Odysseus makes in response to Euryalus's traumatizing insult. The hero likewise picks up the bulky object—"a discus larger than the rest and thick, no little heavier than those with which the Phaeacians were wont to contend one with another"—to prove himself to be an athlete par excellence. According to Athena, Odysseus's throw here is a standing-ovation feat, indirectly defeating the Cyclops and eclipsing his quasi-athletic move. Consequently, the *agon* with the Phaeacians makes Polyphemus's ruthless assault suggestively an *agon* with the hero, too.

Homer thus places the Trojan War hero in a subtle dilemma again when it comes to the matrix of charioteering. Odysseus has profaned Poseidon by blinding his "dear son" Polyphemus (υἱὸν φίλον), which appears to be the only remaining cause of his difficult journey home (11.103).[14] However, as far as existing research is concerned, it has not been pointed out that the hero's case complicates further in a way that connects to athleticism. Odysseus dares, though unawares, to challenge Poseidon in a chariot race (as reflected in the flying hawk images), just as he has also offended the sea god unknowingly on another level after wrecking his son's vision. It comes to that, for Odysseus, to win or not to win, that is the question. As a hero, he must and should win, but

[13] In the *apologoi*, the Phaeacian games appear first because the scene with Polyphemus is a flashback. It is this chronology that enables me to propose that the flashback foreshadows Odysseus's stunning discus throw in the games, which eclipses the giant's similar try with ease.

[14] In the opening book, the bard sings of Odysseus's status quo, in medias res, that now Calypso sees him as her exclusive domain and would not release him. The hero is so pathetic for the moment that "all the gods pitied him save Poseidon" (1.19-20).

as a human, his challenge and triumph cannot but be blasphemy.[15] Hence, the point of the oar challenge becomes even more sophisticated if it serves simultaneously as a method of placation and as a possible form of *agon* that continues the Phaeacian ship-chariot race. Yet, hopefully, such sophistication could add interpretive potential to Teiresias's oracular message, which has been understood in a rather simplistic and reductive manner. So, to scout for the potential mentioned, this paper will address certain issues regarding the equestrian *agon* charioteering to piece together a fuller symbolic picture of the oar test inscribed in the seer's prophetic narrative.

How Odysseus Charioteers on the Phaeacian Ship

If one agrees that the *agon* between Odysseus and Poseidon serves as another athletic scene (a chariot race), though undeclared, through the cross reference between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, an immediate oddity needs to be resolved. As the Phaeacian sailors start out and "tossed the brine with their oarblades," "sweet sleep fell upon" the hero's "eyelids" (13.78-79). His state of sleeping resembles a blessing because his slumber is "most sweet, and most like to death" (13.80). This state even continues when the Phaeacians arrive at Ithaca, so they "laid him down on the sand, still overpowered by sleep" (13.119). In other words, Odysseus has charioteered the ship on no account: presently, this "peer of the gods" "slept in peace, forgetful of all that he had suffered" after the vicissitudes he has sustained in the past twenty years (13.89-92).

It should be noted first that the ancient Greek *agones* are composed of both athletic and equestrian categories. Theoretically speaking, they are open to literally every male adult Greek citizen, but "the extraordinary expense" required to keep and train horses has limited the entry to the latter kind of *agon* to those—"super-rich" or "abnormally extravagant"—whose wealth can make the expense easily affordable (Golden 5). They could also enjoy "multiple entries" at various *agones* that take place at the same time (5). Furthermore—perhaps an oddity to those not familiar with the ancient Greek sport—this socially superior class is not obliged to charioteer for themselves or "even attend the competition" (5). Owners of the horses could hire trained slaves or professionals to charioteer for them, and in cases of hired hands gaining victories, these owners are the true

[15] In a sense, Homer situates him in an impasse similar to Icarus's scenario—a predicament for early Greeks in the "natural culture"—since the attempt to fly already exposes one liable for coveting what belongs properly to gods.

winners who can receive prizes (Miller 72; Crowther 72; Kyle 127). Mark Golden indicates that such a format of competition implies a power struggle since it gives a license to the elite for them "to compete with each without advertising the fact unduly" (5). Hence, based on the social context where the equestrian *agones* are executed, Odysseus's non-seeming contribution to the Phaeacians' charioteering makes sense and transforms him into a charioteer in terms of the Greek chariot race protocol.

The delegation method used by the elite is nevertheless problematic for the reason that it becomes "a commodity of exchange," the exchange of "labor" for "wage" (Nicholson 2). According to Nigel James Nicholson, this sort of exchange debilitates inherently "a central tenet of aristocratic ideology" that the qualities conducive to winning such as "the favor of gods" and "character" are "the exclusive possessions of a few aristocratic families" (2).[16] This model apparently does not apply to Odysseus's case. Therefore, to resolve the elite's complex and embarrassment, another model of proxy arises to help uphold the aristocratic ideologies; it is this model that contextualizes the hero's journey on the Phaeacian ship and makes him a charioteer. If the hired charioteer is "firmly incorporated into the world of the aristocracy" and evolves into a member of the elite's social class, the qualities mentioned above remain confined to the aristocratic circle (Nicholson 50). Namely, as long as the aristocrats follow the mode of "gift exchange" that occurs between friends and family members, they will be "free from the taint of commodity of exchange" (51).

In literary criticism, the friendship established between Odysseus and the Phaeacians inscribed in the Greek custom of hospitality ethics has attracted considerable attention and produced similarly considerable research results. Yet, this paper would like to highlight only two studies that address this topic in rather special ways since firstly, the focus in this study does not lie in the ethics. Secondly, with these two papers placed together side by side, even though they approach the interaction between Odysseus and the Phaeacians from the reception protocol traditionally understood, they constitute a complete illustration of the reciprocal relationship necessary to the forming of friendship between host and guest, culminating in an amity that enables the hero to charioteer on the Phaeacian ship by proxy.

On the part of the Phaeacians, William H. Race's research, "Phaeacian Therapy in Homer's *Odyssey*," reframes exceptionally the host's generosity in a medical context. In response to the arrival of Odysseus, a veritably nameless

[16] Paradoxically, the "commodity of exchange" is also what the elite impugns on a regular basis even though they could resort to or might have exploited the exchange model (Nicholson 2).

stranger to the locals, the Phaeacian King Alcinous welcomes him in all sincerity without being inquisitive. What Race has proposed is to view the king's reception of the hero as treating and taking medical care of an invalid. In this light, the island of the Phaeacians turns into a "halfway house," preparing the hero "to reenter the society [Ithaca] where Odysseus has been absent for so many years as a warrior and a wanderer" (47). Recall that his stay on the Scheria (home of the Phaeacians) is the final stop in the *apologoi*, and also that now he has been devastated to the point of even losing a decent outfit upon his arrival. Alcinous then acts as a therapist who helps restore Odysseus to health, both mentally and physically, through "provision of basic physical necessities," "socialization," and "physical and psychological therapy" (47). Such medical assistance forms a plausible act of gift-giving.

To reciprocate, Odysseus's gift-giving can be explored and understood from the rather intriguing perspective Corinne Ondine Pache offers in her "Odysseus and the Phaeacians." She purposely focuses attention on the enigmatic story, the "catalogue of women," narrated by the hero in the *nekyia* (Odysseus's traveling to the underworld), which seems puzzlingly unrelated to the hero himself in the adventures (detailed and summed up by himself in the *apologoi*) he has experienced (21). Quite the reverse, the "catalogue of women" has been incorporated in the *apologoi* for the general purpose of persuading the Phaeacians to escort him back home. In particular, this story has been specifically told because Odysseus knows what would amuse their ears. It is the beauty of words and love stories that appeal to them; Pache points out that the former is especially targeted at Alcinous, who is "unquestionably more concerned with aesthetics than truth" (24). As to the love stories in the "catalogue of women," they cater notably to the taste of the queen Arete—she not only "compliments Odysseus" but also "calls for more gifts to be given to him" (28). In Pache's final analysis, the enigmatic "catalogue of women" is "Odysseus' gift to Arete" (28). Re-contextualized in the situation of charioteering by proxy, such an ethical norm of gift-exchange in Greek hospitality in the case of Odysseus vis-à-vis the Phaeacians thus distinguishes itself from the model of commodity of exchange. The hero and the Phaeacians evolve into friends, who can charioteer for one another without contravening any aristocratic ideology.

How Odysseus as a Charioteer Signifies

Thus far, with the mention of the oar-wing both by Teiresias in Book 11 and by Odysseus to his wife in Book 23, and the intervening hawk-like ship-

chariot described by Homer in Book 13, one can discern that an underlying schema has been established to fashion the hero as a charioteer. Instead of capturing attention, such a hidden message signifies in a way that has rarely attracted scholarly notice. For one thing, Odysseus's heroism has been largely circumscribed within *metis* in literary criticism since classical antiquity—a heroic quality considered to be antithetical to the attribute *bie* (strength) that characterizes the other major hero in Homer, Achilles. The other thing is that even if Odysseus comes to be recognized as an athletic hero, too, his athletic identity remains inadequate, thus making him, in a sense, a lesser hero though these two Homeric heroes are juxtaposed side by side as the leading luminaries in the Greek imagination.

To dismantle the dichotomy between *metis* and *bie* characterizing Odysseus and Achilles, the above-mentioned Books 8, 21, and 23 offer textual details that could be a quick solution to the reductive portrayal of Odysseus merely as a crafty hero. In them, his unparalleled mastery of discus-throwing, boxing, and archery evidences his possession of brawn. Perhaps the Phaeacian prince Laodamas points out precisely the acclaim one can receive if they could dominate others in *agones*. He is then trying to persuade Odysseus to participate in their games, relating that "there is no greater glory for a man so long as he lives than that which he achieves by his own hands and his feet" (8.147-48). Although the expression "no greater glory for a man" here might not necessarily be a superlative form in the Greek text—which is "a man's superb prestige" (μεῖζον κλέος ἀνέρος) (Liddell and Scott, s.v. "μεῖζον")—Odysseus's furious reply to Euryalus's indictment of him as non-athletic and his immediate action to prove his athletic capacity at the expense of his intended anonymity show the extremely honored status of being a commanding athlete (8.158-205). Regarding this, Donald G. Kyle, one of the few scholars who study sport in Homer, points to the fact that Homeric heroes are significantly athletic, too, and *agones* serve for them as "a mechanism for status definition and display" (56, 70).

Still, one embarrassment remains for Odysseus. With all the textual evidence favorable to him, the hero takes no part in the chariot race held in Book 23 of the *Iliad* to mourn the death of Patroclus. Considering the cost of keeping and training horses, as mentioned above, Stephen G. Miller advances that "it is telling that Odysseus who is clearly one of the poorer Greek kings at Troy must rely more upon his wits than his wealth" (28).[17] However, the

[17] George John Stagakis refers to another possible reason mulled over by certain scholars: Odysseus has no horse-driven chariots because Ithaca is geographically rugged with mountains (255). However, the scholar argues that it cannot serve as a reason for the hero's lack of a charioteer; please see the fol-

embarrassment exists also for another reason. The scholar George John Stagakis asks whether Odysseus has his own charioteer in Troy in his study—note that he does not ask whether the hero is a charioteer or not. He argues that, based on the narrative pattern of "an injured warrior *is escorted* [by his/her charioteer] from the scene of the injury" in the *Iliad*, as in the cases of Aphrodite and Hector, whether it is Agamemnon's or Odysseus's charioteer who arrives to escort the wounded hero (in Book 11) can be disambiguated because of the said pattern: the escort is truthfully "an ἡνίοχος [charioteer] of Odysseus" (Stagakis 262). Yet, this finding paradoxically reveals that the hero is no charioteer or that he can not charioteer; what is more, heroes and nobles contesting one another in the chariot race in the games held for Patroclus charioteer on their own, not by proxy. So, the underlying schema created in the *Odyssey* to make the hero a de facto charioteer, whether intended by Homer or not, draws one's attention to the equestrian side of Odysseus and perfects his identity of an athlete in the broadest sense of the term.

Before moving on to consider the oar test in the structure of Teiresias's oracular message as a whole in the context of a chariot race, one may take into consideration an episode in the *Odyssey* to recognize that the hero's equestrian side might have been stronger than expected. In Book 8 of the epic, he requests the bard Demodocus during the Phaeacian feast to sing of the wooden horse in the Trojan War:

> But come now, change thy theme, and sing of the building of the horse of wood, which Epeius made with Athena's help, the horse which once Odysseus led up into the citadel as a thing of guile, when he had filled it with the men who sacked Ilios. If thou dost indeed tell me this tale aright, I will declare to all mankind that the god has of a ready heart granted thee the gift of divine song. (8.492-98)

The minstrel complies accordingly. He begins the story, as Homer reports,

> where the Argives had embarked on their benched ships and were sailing away, after casting fire on their huts, while those others led by glorious Odysseus were now sitting in the place of assembly of the Trojans, hidden in the horse; for the Trojans had themselves dragged it to the citadel. (8.500-04)

There is "a slip in the narrative" from Odysseus's request in Homer's summary of what Demodocus sings: while the hero leads (ἤγαγε) the horse in the former, he hides (κεκαλυμμένοι) in it in the latter (Murphy 18). What is of interest here, however, is that, quite patently, Odysseus correlates positively with horses even though in this context it is a wooden horse. In this manner, the episode

lowing section in my paper for his rationale.

fortuitously extends his athletic identity to encompass a charioteer-like aspect in the sense that he could manage horses one way or another (either in leading or hiding himself in them).

The Oar Test and Its Relation to Chariot Races

As reviewed earlier, the oar challenge has been largely read as Odysseus's acting as a missionary for the sea god. It is a flawed reductionism, though, for the reason that Teiresias brings up the challenge in a prophecy where it constitutes only part of the oracular narrative. In particular, it seems that what the hero is instructed to do following the oar being mistaken for a winnowing device has not been sufficiently addressed. It is natural for him to "fix in the earth thy shapely oar and make goodly offerings to lord Poseidon—a ram, and a bull, and a boar that mates with sows"—to conciliate the god (*Od*. 129-31). Nonetheless, in the very same sentence, true completion appears to occur only when the hero will then hereafter "depart for thy home and offer sacred hecatombs to the immortal gods who hold broad heaven, to each one in due order" (*Od*. 132-34). The comma in the Greek text that connects the Poseidon part and the journey back home must therefore mean something to be fathomed out (…ἀρνειὸν ταῦρόν τε συῶν τ᾽ ἐπιβήτορα κάπρον, οἴκαδ᾽ ἀποστείχειν ἔρδειν θ᾽ ἱερᾶς ἑκατόμβας…). Among others, this paper would like to propound that, with a view to Odysseus's need to return home again, interestingly another *nostos*, Homer artfully (though not clearly showing) re/integrates the hero further into the scheme of modelling him as a charioteer.

Let one approach the re/integration from the perspective of what actually happens in a charioteering *agon*. Contestants are obliged to complete certain laps, racing forth and racing back several times. Yet, before returning, they have to bypass a turning point so that they can finish each lap successfully. In the funeral games held for Patroclus in the *Iliad*, Nestor particularly draws his son Antilochus's attention to this turning point, "a turning-post" (νύσσα) (23.332). Namely, in point of format, charioteers must return by way of the post so as to execute the laps in chariot races. With the underlying schema mentioned earlier concerning Odysseus's charioteer identity, return is thus an essential procedure which signifies more than spreading the fame of Poseidon. Moreover, whether a successful return can be made is one major key to winning in a chariot race. As Nestor instructs and cautions his son about bypassing the turning-post:

> Pressing hard thereon do thou drive close thy chariot and horses, and thyself lean in thy well-plaited car a little to the left of the pair, and to the off horse do thou give the goad, calling to him with a shout, and give him rein from thy hand. But to the post let the near horse draw close, that the nave of the well-wrought wheel seem to graze the surface thereof—but be thou ware of touching the stone, lest haply thou wound thy horses and wreck thy car; so should there be joy for the rest, but reproach it for thyself. (*Il.* 23.334-42)

What the father tries to emphasize is that his son should make a dexterous U-turn and by no means graze the post or the stone placed near it so as to avoid destruction. Such wreckage, if it happens at all, is not merely physical but also psychological. Just recall how Laodamas says there is no higher distinction a man can achieve "so long as he lives than that which he achieves by his own hands and his feet" (*Od.* 8.145-49). A charioteer's ability to return thus carries significance that corresponds to that of Odysseus's meeting a traveler ignorant of the sea. The oar the hero plants in the ground then as a matter of fact transforms into a turning device he can bypass to complete his lap by returning home.

Nestor's words to his son also point to the role of wise judgment in charioteering, whose validity, fittingly, reverberates through Odysseus's oar challenge at certain levels. One obvious judgment to be made is, as might be expected, how a certain traveler will mistake the oar for a winnowing device. This is a wrong judgment that Odysseus has to find, recognize, and even judge to be a sign for him to plant the oar in the ground. The hero does know the oar he carries is an oar, but still, the text seems to indicate that he has to make a wise judgment through the traveler to know that an oar is not the said device so that he can understand the sign and "depart for thy home."[18]

Precisely, what is required of Odysseus is his sound judgment in the oar test so that he can turn back home, which is likewise implied by the

[18] Readers might question how far the hero has to go inland, which Homer has not narrativized. They can under-problematize this question because the poet implies and foreshadows the probability of meeting a traveler ignorant of the oar earlier on. Take the Cyclopes into consideration. Not far from their island is "a wooded isle," abounding with resources but not yet cultivated and colonized by the one-eyed giant cannibals (*Od.* 9.116-24). "For the Cyclopes," according to the hero, "have at hand no ships with vermilion cheeks, nor are there ship-wrights in their land who might build them well-benched ships" (9.125-26). There might be special circumstances for these giants not to attempt making ships and avail themselves of the resources on a nearby island. Nonetheless, their lack of ship-making skills, not to mention their relation to Poseidon, evidently debunks the myth of the necessary correlation between familiarity with the sea and whatever that could be entailed due to such familiarity, the oar included. So, the real issue lies in whether Odysseus could make a judgment that enables his return procedure in the chariot race, a wise one if he recognizes by proxy the oar not as a winnowing device. Please also refer to Footnote 6 for the unwarranted correlation between being remote from the sea and the subsequent acquisition of sea knowledge in the case of Cyclopes.

winnowing device itself. On the condition that the wind is favorably strong, "numerous ancient sources" have recorded that harvested wheat would be "trampled by animals on a threshing-floor" and "thrown up into the air" with the device separating "grain" and "seeds" from the "chaff" (Olson 8). S. Douglas Olson thus argues that the oar test, because of its association through the device which does the separation, is a "scrutiny" for Odysseus to learn how to judge matters wisely (8). As a counterexample, his followers have not made a sound judgment regarding the Cattle of the Sun when "put to the test by the appearance of high winds" (8). Olson also points out that the oar test and the Sun's likely fatal threat are the only two reminders Teiresias highlights in his prophecy; in fact, although the two are outwardly unrelated, they are both underlined by the need to distinguish between feasible and unfeasible decisions as judgments are made (7-8). Hence, the hypothetical matrix of ship, chariot, and oar takes on one more dimension: the province of sage judgments.

Conclusion and the Issues of Only One Contestant and the Unfulfilled Prophecy

To conclude, as discussed above, through the dialectic between oar and wing in Teiresias's oracular narrative and the intertext between the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* in point of chariots racing like hawks, Odysseus's journey on the Phaeacian ship makes the hero himself a charioteer. Such an identity continues in his journey inland in his capacity as an advocate for Poseidon. Notably, the oar fixed in the ground signifies a turning point a charioteer has to bypass to return so as to complete a lap. So, the instruction for Odysseus to go home after a certain wayfarer mistakes the oar for a winnowing device makes sense when one comes to wonder why Homer juxtaposes this instruction with that for the hero to "make goodly offerings to lord Poseidon" in the same Greek sentence.

Finally, two more issues have to be addressed to complement the picture of the oar task as a chariot race. For one thing, at least in the Homeric domain, for one to be recognized as a true athlete or a charioteer, the number of contestants does not matter; it could be just one person. For instance, in the spear-throwing *agon* in the *Iliad* (in the funeral games for Patroclus), Agamemnon is recognized as the victor and given prizes even though the competition does not take place at all (23.884-95). The same applies to the Phaeacian games in Book 8 of the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus's discus throw is so invincible that he is also recognized tacitly as a victor whether in running, boxing, and wrestling without competing bodily (8.202-40). In the former case, Kyle explains that Homer layers the

victory with the meaning of "a gesture of reconciliation" since Achilles hosts the event (64). Such a gesture also constitutes the nature of the latter case, where Odysseus has been previously insulted as non-athletic. Correspondingly, if Odysseus passes the oar test, he similarly makes a gesture to reconcile with Poseidon without competing, either. As a result, Odysseus is a lone charioteer, but the *agon* still happens without his engagement with others—in the Homeric world of sport.

The other thing is, if some other contestant exists at all, they must be Poseidon because, ever since Odysseus blinds his son, the sea god has engaged himself in a sort of competition in which he is the ironical version of deus ex machina who problematizes the hero's journey back to Ithaca. Moreover, the simile of the Phaeacian ship as a hawk has implicated the hero without his knowledge implicitly in a charioteering *agon* with Poseidon. In view of this, perhaps Homer has decided not to narrativize how Odysseus fulfills the prophecy—for the fundamental reason that humans should never compete with deities. The hero is somehow aware of this. For example, after escaping from Polyphemus, he makes sacrifices to Zeus: nevertheless, Odysseus says, Zeus "heeded not my sacrifice, but was planning how all my well-benched ships might perish and my trusty comrades" (9.551-55). Rainer Friedrich observes in this Zeus's "displeasure at Odysseus and his sanctioning of Poseidon's persecution of the hero" (16). After all, the hero has offended the sea god, and in a greater context, it is the divine terrain on which the hero has trespassed. If so, it also makes sense for him to "offer sacred hecatombs to the immortal gods who hold broad heaven, to each one in due order" following his second *nostos*. One can see, therefore, Homer might have been quite cautious in not staging the fulfillment of the oar test, now understood to be a charioteering *agon* as well, since the gap between the divine and the human is absolute and in no way to be bridged even for the god's near-peer Odysseus. For the moment, to meet the purpose of this paper, it suffices to conclude that the hero is also a charioteer when one approaches the *Odyssey* in the category of sport.

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奧德修斯的費阿克斯飛船之旅：一樁英雄化身爲戰車馭手的奇事

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摘要

身爲卓越水手的費阿克斯人，在《奧德賽》第十三卷中，划船快捷，護送奧德修斯返鄉至伊薩卡。船駛入大海後，前進如此迅速，即使是飛禽之最的鷹也不得不居其之後，望塵莫及（13.87）。藉由這種對比，荷馬強調費阿克斯人的航海技巧，證明了他們技藝精湛，但詩人於此使用的比喻或有其進一步探討的空間。他說，疾駛前進的船就如同陸地上由四匹駿馬牽引的戰車（13.81-83），此一明喻除了顯示費阿克斯人在航海方面的非凡能力，更可能巧妙地將奧德修斯轉化爲一名戰車馭手。而安吉力拿（Catalin Anghelina）注意到荷馬將費阿克斯船比作四馬戰車，回應、影射了《伊利亞特》（13.23-31）中波塞冬的戰車駕馭，則使得上述可探討的空間多了些令人玩味的想像。亦即，關於海神御車，詩人描述道，祂的戰車駕馭猶如雄偉的鷹翱翔般靈動（13.63）；然而考量到費阿克斯船快於鷹及其延伸意涵，可推斷出奧德修斯或許是一位比波塞冬更優秀的戰車馭手，因而荷馬似乎暗指英雄再次觸犯了他已經不幸褻瀆的神威。因而，本文旨在探討奧德修斯之於運動競技的英雄主義，即從戰車駕馭的角度(此爲文學批評中鮮少受關注的文化維度)，重新思索奧德修斯的費阿克斯快船之旅如何連結至其與波塞冬的嚴峻對立。再者，本文也認爲有必要將此議題置於泰瑞西亞司向英雄奧德修斯揭示的神諭脈絡中，因其指向英雄自述航海奇緣（*apologoi*）與《奧德賽》的整體圖像在敘事上的一致性。

關鍵字： 奧德修斯、波賽冬、戰車駕馭、戰車馭手、費阿克斯船、希臘運動